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COMOR-D - 24/44

15 February 1963

MEMORANDUM FOR: Chairman, United States Intelligence Board

SUBJECT: Proposal for Continuation of Low-Level  
Photography of Cuba

1. On 5 February the Director of Central Intelligence discussed with higher authority a Committee on Overhead Reconnaissance proposal to resume low-level photography against 24 targets in Cuba. This proposal was generated not on the strong suspicion that any one target was, in itself, ominous in terms of known activity or equipment but rather on an accumulation of gaps in our detailed information which could mean our failure to detect developments of grave concern to the U.S. \* While that proposal was not approved when presented, COMOR still considers it a valid intelligence requirement.

2. Last weekend low-level missions were approved and carried out against Mariel, the port at which the Khimik Zelensky docked, and over three other priority target installations in the area. As you know, the low-level photography of the port was too late since the Khimik Zelensky had been already unloaded. In addition, the

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\*The CIA Member feels that the second sentence of the first paragraph should be amended so as to read: "This proposal was generated by an accumulation of gaps in our detailed information which could mean our failure to detect developments of grave concern to the U.S. "

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installations at Cayo Frances, Guerra, Santiago de las Vegas, and Artemisa were covered. The photography on these targets was carefully examined. This examination confirmed and added some detail to our knowledge of the equipment and installations covered, but revealed no changes in their status which might point to an ominous activity. It should be noted however that the coverage was not complete and the results are therefore not conclusive.

3. As one measure to maximize the use of information collected and being collected, careful examination of agent reports since January 1962 has been underway. Thus far there has emerged no pattern. The details of any single report do not point to any specific target or targets which we would conclude are in themselves ominous. Of current grave concern has been the unconfirmed report of well-like holes approximately 12 to 14 feet in diameter in the area between Bahia Honda and Cabanas. While no report associates these wells with missile activity, the possibility of such association has been very carefully examined. After comparison of these reports with our information on the Soviet Union we find it is not likely that such wells could be used for hardened sites for offensive missiles as we know them in the USSR. A careful examination of [REDACTED] photography as far back as early January 1963 does not confirm the

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existence of these holes nor does it reveal in the environs such security, transportation, or construction facilities or activity which would be required for the development of a hardened missile launch silo.

4. COMOR has considered the case of the wells which was viewed as an example of the kind of alarming reports which cannot be totally disproved on the basis of our present intelligence. It also considered the status of our intelligence on Cuba and the need for action to insure, insofar as possible, against the development of some emerging new development or surprise from some undetected missile capability. It is our strong feeling that the proposal of 5 February is still valid and that low-level photography of the targets (excepting, of course, Cayo Frances and Guerra which were completely covered last weekend) should be instituted. COMOR specifically recommends at this time that low-level photography should be directed against the following targets which it considers to be the most likely to be the location of activities significant to change in the status. It must be borne in mind, however, that the selection of these targets does not mean that others previously proposed are no longer of interest. These in the near future should likewise be covered. The remainder of the list of targets is appended at Tab A.

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5. \* The targets are proposed in order of priority for immediate low-level photography:

a. Mayari Arriba

Mayari Arriba is one of the principal installations on the island whose function is not immediately discernible. Access to the site which is remotely located in rough terrain was created by the construction of an expensive access road. We have concluded that the canvas-covered stepped roof vehicle is sensitive in nature. Its configuration is unlike any known Soviet conventional or missile weaponry. Nothing so far identified associates this vehicle with coastal-defense type cruise-missile equipment. Experience with

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[REDACTED] has shown that we will not solve this enigma from high-altitude photography. There is a chance that low-level photography may provide significant increments toward a solution.

b. Holguin

c. Remedios

Holguin and Remedios are of prime importance among the military encampments previously listed because of their size, the extreme security measures surrounding them, and the presence of Soviets. [REDACTED] has not provided the detailed information needed for an accurate estimate of the activity at these two locations.

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\*DIA and USAF members recommend that a fourth target, either Santa Barbara or Pepu, also be included at this time. These targets are high on their suspect list because of the unidentified activity seen on [REDACTED] photography.

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Committee on Overhead Reconnaissance